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U.S. GENERAL RUNS QUIET LAOS TEAM

Pentagon Denies He Exists,
but American in Mufti Is
Training Royal Troops

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Whatever successes the Laotian Government has scored in battles with the pro-Communist Patet Lao forces can be attributed in large part to effective training by a special United States unit headed by a colorful West Pointer nicknamed "the Prussian," qualified sources said today.

The Prussian is John Arnold Heintges, 48 years old, the key figure in a somewhat mysterious story of the United States military aid program to the embattled Southeast Asian kingdom.

Under the 1954 Geneva truce accords, only France was permitted to have a military advisory group in Laos. The United States, therefore, established a "program evaluation office." More than 100 technicians were sent to teach the Laotians how to maintain and use United States military equipment.

A. U. S. 'Non-Person'

The Americans instruct the Laotians on how to fire their carbine and machine guns, how to drive jeeps and trucks, how to build bridges and how to conduct close-order drill. They must leave instruction in tactics and strategy to the French.

What is puzzling about the assignment of the head of the United States group to Laos is that he could be dead, perhaps never have existed, insofar as official Army records are concerned.

It appears that John Arnold Heintges is the United States equivalent of a Soviet "non-person." This term was used by the author George Orwell to describe individuals dropped from Soviet encyclopedias and histories when their existence—past or present—proved embarrassing to the Kremlin.

John Arnold Heintges rose to the rank of brigadier general. His name was listed in the official Army Registers from 1936, the year of his graduation from West Point, through 1958. But his name does not appear in the 1959 or 1960 Registers.

Moreover, no one at the Pentagon can be found who will acknowledge knowing him, despite the fact that his assignment to Laos is known.

General Heintges has been described as a tall, lean, tough infantryman who served with distinction in the Third Division in Italy and France during

World War II. He has a scar on his cheek that looks like a Heidelberg duelling scar but came from a swimming pool fall.

He was born in Coblenz, Germany, in 1912. His father, a German officer, was killed in World War I. His widowed mother, also a German, married Capt. Kie Doty, who served in the United States army of occupation and afterward rose to the rank of colonel.

Young Heintges was an "Army brat." His stepfather served in Alaska and various posts in the United States. His nickname was given to General Heintges at West Point; it is believed that he comes from a long line of Prussian officers.

Wounded in World War II

He was graduated, commissioned and married on the same day, June 14, 1936. He and his wife, the former Betty Chapman Lovejoy, have three children. Their home address is believed to be Fort McKinley, Ma.

In World War II General Heintges was wounded in the heavy fighting in Italy. He later rejoined his unit for front-line action in Southern France.

After the war his assignments included serving with the military advisory group attached to the West German Government's new born military forces. It is said that, although he has spoken German fluently since he was a child, he took a refresher course before reporting in Bonn.

His official biography at the Pentagon does not indicate when he became a brigadier general, although it was presumably when he took command of Fort Dix in January, 1958.

General Heintges' record appears to end in August, 1958, when he was ordered to report to the Eighth Army in Seoul, Korea, the following January.

Familiar Sight in Laos

The general has not been in hiding. He and his men, wearing civilian clothes, frequently casual slacks and sport jackets, have been a familiar sight at army camps near Vientiane.

Many of the men bear tattoos such as "Third Infantry Forever" on their forearms. The general appears to have brought many of his old comrades to his Laos assignment. They call him "Mister."

The official United States Government explanation of the duties of the members of the Program Evaluation Office is meagre. But there has been no explanation why the record of General Heintges has been expunged, or of why the mention of his name in print seems to embarrass the Pentagon and the State Department.

The members of his staff are said to be "retired Army men," but many of them, like General Heintges, no longer have their names on Army lists.

Persons in a position to know say they are not assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency, which presumably has its own representatives on the ground.

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